

# Tropical Dreams



*Representations of the Tropical in Finland*

*Anna-Sofia Sysser*



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## Abstract

In this thesis I study representations of the tropics and the tropical in Finland. I analyze the artificial 'tropical' specifically in aesthetic and commercial uses. I examine the phenomenon within the Finnish context and through my artistic practice. The concept of *tropicality* (e.g. Arnold, 1996; Driver, 2009) forms the theoretical background of my study. Tropicality refers to a discourse in which the tropics is seen as the 'Western' world's environmental Other and the tropical is exoticized. The thesis has two outcomes: this publication and my solo exhibition, both ready in December 2017.

My research questions are as follows: What kind of representations and uses of the tropical can be found in Finland? What are the typical imagery and vocabulary used when constructing the tropical/tropics? How has the 'tropical' influenced my personal artistic practice?

I examine the issues at hand through research data, related literature and my artistic practice. The data I have collected includes commercial products and places labeled as 'tropical', such as food and cleaning products and spas and botanical gardens (e.g. Tropical Müsli, Tropiclandia). I analyze recurrent imagery and language used in these everyday commodities and commercial sites. I have gathered the data experientially and approach it in multisensory ways. I visited the 'tropical' places personally. In observing and describing my experiences I apply a method of descriptive aesthetics (Berleant, 1992).

The observations from the analysis are mirrored against previous research and the historical backgrounds of the phenomenon. I aim to create an understanding of a phenomenon one could call 'Finnish tropical'. The scope of my research is novel as the artificial tropical has not been previously studied in Finland, and tropicality is a rather unknown topic in

the Finnish field of research. My aim is to bring the topic into discussion, both within the context of contemporary art and visual culture, and more widely.

Based on my analysis, I claim that 'tropical' is a notable construction in Finland and that it is widely used for commercial purposes. The 'tropical' is represented as exotic, positive and appealing to the senses, the tropics as paradisiacal. 'Tropical' products and places are created and advertised mostly with images of flora, only sometimes fauna. Humans and culture are absent from the construction of the 'Finnish tropical'. It is created on the basis of essentialized elements, which could be seen as othering. 'Tropical' imagery and language has similarities with the concept of vacationing and images of tourist holidays. The observations also lead to pondering ecological questions related to the theme.

In my artistic practice, I have worked with themes related to the tropics since January 2015. I have also traveled in seven countries situated in the tropical zone. I explore how my artistic practice has been influenced by both my travels and the theoretical and practical aspects I have encountered during the thesis process. I trace the characteristics of my working and the development of my thinking: from admiring the tropical to examining the 'tropical'.

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**Keywords** / Tropical, Tropicality, Artificial Tropical, Representations, Environmental Otherness, Othering

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## Tiivistelmä

Opinnäytetyössäni tutkin tropiikin ja trooppisuuden representaatioita Suomessa. Analysoin keinotekoisia 'trooppista' erityisesti esteettisessä ja kaupallisessa käytössä. Tarkastelen ilmiötä suomalaisessa kontekstissa sekä oman taiteellisen työni kautta. Tutkimukseni teoreettisena taustana on *tropikalism*in (engl. tropicality, esim. Arnold, 1996; Driver, 2009) käsite ja näkökulma. Tropikalismi viittaa diskurssiin, jossa tropiikki nähdään 'läntisen' maailman ympäristöllisenä Toisena ja trooppisuus eksotisoidaan. Opinnäytetyössäni on kaksi lopputuotosta: tämä kirjallinen julkaisu sekä yksityisnäyttelyni. Molemmat valmistuvat joulukuussa 2017.

Tutkimuskysymykseni ovat: Minkälaisia trooppisen representaatioita ja käyttötarkoituksia Suomesta löytyy? Millaisia ovat tyypillinen kuvasto ja kieli, joita käytetään trooppisen konstruomisessa? Miten tämä 'trooppinen' on vaikuttanut omaan taiteelliseen työskentelyyni?

Käytän aiheen tutkimiseen aineistoa, kirjallisuutta ja omaa taiteellista praktiikkaani. Keräämäni aineisto sisältää kaupallisia tuotteita ja paikkoja, jotka on nimetty 'trooppisiksi', kuten ruoka- ja siivoustuotteet sekä kylpylät ja kasvitieteelliset puutarhat (esim. Trooppinen Mysli, Tropiclandia). Analysoin arkipäivän tuotteissa ja kaupallisissa kohteissa toistuvaa 'trooppista' kuvastoa ja kieltä. Olen kerännyt aineistoa kokemuksellisesti ja käsittelen sitä moniaistisesti. Vieralin henkilökohtaisesti tutkimissani 'trooppisissa' paikoissa. Hyödynnän deskriptiivisen estetiikan (descriptive aesthetics, Berleant 1992) metodologia, kun havainnoin ja kuvailen kokemuksiani.

Kytken aineistosta nousevat havaintoni aikaisempaan tutkimukseen ja ilmiön historiallisiin taustoihin. Pyrin hahmottamaan ilmiötä, josta voisi käyttää nimeä 'suomalais-trooppinen'. Tutkimukseni näkökulma on uusi, sillä keinotekoisia trooppisuutta ei ole aiemmin tutkittu Suomessa,

ja tropikalismi on suomalaisessa tutkimuksessa varsin tuntematon keskustelunaihe. Tavoitteeni on tuoda aihe keskusteluun nykyaikaisen ja visuaalisen kulttuurin kontekstissa, sekä laajemmin.

Analyysini pohjalta väitän, että 'trooppinen' on merkittävä konstruktio Suomessa ja sitä käytetään laajasti kaupallisissa tarkoituksissa. 'Trooppisuus' esitetään eksoottisena, positiivisena ja aisteihin vetoavana, tropiikki paratiisillisena. 'Trooppisissa' tuotteissa ja paikoissa sekä niiden mainonnassa toistuu yleisimmin kasvikkuvasto, harvemmin myös eläinkunta. Ihmiset ja kulttuuri ovat poissa 'suomalais-trooppisesta' konstruktioista. 'Suomalais-trooppinen' rakentuu essentialisoitujen elementtien pohjalta ja tämän voi tulkita toiseuttavaksi. 'Trooppisessa' kuvastossa ja sanastossa on yhtäläisyyksiä lomailemisen (vacationing) teemoihin sekä turistilomien mielikuviiin. Havainnot johdattavat pohtimaan myös aiheeseen liittyviä ekologisia kysymyksiä.

Taiteellisessa työskentelyssäni olen toiminut tropiikkiin liittyvien teemojen parissa tammikuusta 2015 alkaen. Olen myös matkustanut seitsemässä eri maassa trooppisella vyöhykkeellä. Pohdin, miten sekä nämä matkat, että opinnäytetyöprosessini aikana kohtaamani teoreettiset ja käytännölliset ulottuvuudet ovat vaikuttaneet taiteelliseen työskentelyyni. Jäljitän työskentelyni ominaispiirteitä sekä ajatteluni kehittymistä trooppisen ihailemisesta 'trooppisen' tutkimiseen.

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**Avainsanat** / trooppinen, tropikalismi, keinotekoinen trooppinen, representaatiot, ympäristöllinen toinen, toiseuttaminen

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## 1. Introduction: 'tropical' in Finland

A few years ago I was waiting for a bus in downtown Helsinki, staring at an advertisement on the bus stop. It advertised Fazer's<sup>1</sup> candy which was described as *tropical*. I realized then that I did not know what tropical means literally. Although, the image of it was clear: warmth, bright colors, pineapples, paradise, palm trees, relaxing... I began to notice this tropical recurring in my everyday life in Finland and became fascinated by it. In the same time period I got more interested in traveling and had the chance to travel to a few tropical countries. Since then, I have traveled to seven countries situated (at least partly) in the tropical zone, gathering more information on the subject – both from theoretical sources and empirically. In relation to this, I find it interesting to study how the concept of 'tropical' is used in Finland in various contexts. I wonder: how do these images guide our perceptions of the tropics? Or: how does a candy or a spa experience change when it is framed as 'tropical'?

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<sup>1</sup> Fazer is a Finnish company producing delicacies

In this thesis I study representations of the tropics and the tropical in Finland. I focus on the artificial ‘tropical’ and analyze it specifically in aesthetic and commercial uses. I use the word ‘tropical’ in single quotation marks to refer to this constructed or artificial tropical. The ‘tropical’ appears on various occasions in Finland and by analyzing examples – ranging from everyday commodities to commercial sites – I aim to create an understanding of this phenomenon one could call ‘*Finnish tropical*’. I examine the phenomenon within the Finnish context and within my artistic practice.

The concept and point of view of *tropicality* forms the theoretical background of my study. Tropicality refers to a discourse in which the tropics is seen as the ‘Western’ world’s environmental Other and the tropical is exoticized<sup>2</sup>. This way of thinking encompasses society and everyday life broadly, from grocery shopping to academic discourses. My aim is to bring the topic into discussion within the context of contemporary art and visual culture and more widely.

I examine the topic through research data, related literature and my artistic practice. In addition to the theoretical approach I maintain an experiential relation to my subject. During the same time period that I wrote this thesis, I conducted artistic experiments in order to gather material for this study and to conclude my findings in exhibition format. The thesis has two outcomes: this publication and my solo exhibition, both ready in December 2017.

Framing this subject and the data suitable for the analysis have been important decisions. Most importantly, this is not research on the tropics, but research focusing on representations and constructions of the tropics and the tropical found in Finland. Still, in order to address the artificial ‘tropical’, it is important to begin by taking a look at the definitions of the tropics and the tropical.

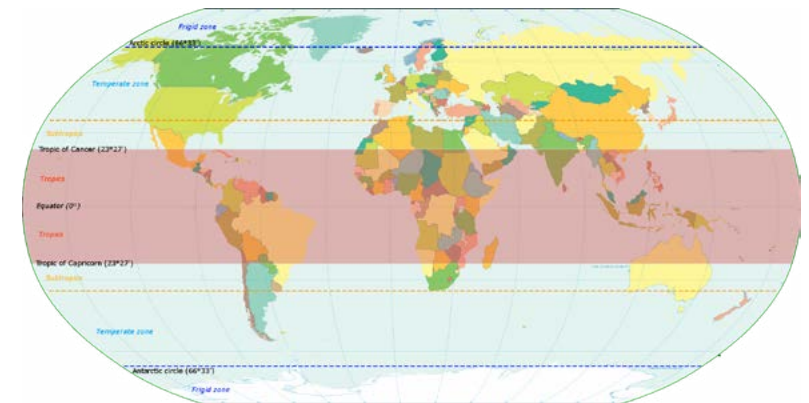
<sup>2</sup> See for example David Arnold, *The Problem of Nature: Environment, Culture and European Expansion* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996) and Felix Driver, “Tropicality” in *Dictionary of Human Geography* (5th Edition), ed. Derek Gregory et al. (Malden: Blackwell, 2009), 777.

## Definitions of the tropics and the tropical

*Tropics: 1 The two lines of latitude at which the Sun is directly overhead at the solstices: the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn.*

*2 The climatic region that lies between these two latitudes, sometimes called the equatorial zone.<sup>3</sup>*

*Tropical: Relating to, situated in, or characteristic of the tropics, the region on either side of the equator, between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn, in which climate varies relatively little from season to season.<sup>4</sup>*



*A map indicating the Tropical zone (highlighted in red). Subtropics, Temperate zones and Frigid zones are also indicated.*

*Image: Author KVDP, under licence Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported.*

<sup>3</sup> Storm Dunlop, *A Dictionary of Weather* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> Chris C. Park and Michael Allaby, *A Dictionary of Environment and Conservation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

122 countries have landmasses in the tropics. The majority of the world's biodiversity, 80% of animal and plant species, 92% of the world's coral reefs and 40% of the world's population currently live in the tropics – this percentage is predicted to rise up to 55% by the year 2050.<sup>5</sup> As can be deduced from this data, the tropics are a wide and very much varied area in terms of landscapes, inhabitants and life in general. These definitions reveal that the tropics or tropical is firstly described using geographical and cartographical definitions. But other definitions can be found that take me closer to opening up related meanings and associations. One interesting notion rises from the etymology of the word 'tropic' in relation to the concept of *trope*. Originating from the Greek word *trōpē* meaning "turn, turning", tropical has also these connotations: "Relating to, involving, or of the nature of a trope or tropes -- metaphorical, figurative."<sup>6</sup> Until the late 17th century this was the predominant sense of the word<sup>7</sup>. This could be one reason why the word tropical possesses such metaphorical power in its contemporary uses.

Another dictionary definition refers to other, more instrumentalizing uses of "tropical": "Designating a colourful pattern or design based on images associated with the tropics, such as exotic flowers, trees, birds, etc. Now also of an item of clothing: patterned with such a design."<sup>8</sup> Here we come closer to the 'tropical' I am tracing. In this thesis instead of cartographical definitions, I am interested in the tropical as a construction; I trace the imaginative and associative sides of the concept of the 'tropical'. I find interesting metaphorical grounds in these "fake-tropicals".

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5 "Tropical Data Hub", James Cook University, accessed March 13, 2017, <https://tropicaldatahub.org>.

6 Angus Stevenson, ed., *Oxford Dictionary of English* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

7 Oxford English Dictionary (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

8 Ibid.

## Tropicality – tropical as an environmental Other

Tropicality can be summarized, as geographer Daniel Clayton does, as: "the colonising discourse that constructs the tropical world as the West's environmental Other"<sup>9</sup>. The concept was introduced by historian David Arnold in his book *The Problem of Nature* in 1996. Arnold reflects critically on European explorers' and writers' texts on the tropics starting from the 15th century throughout the development of European imperialism, and ending with more contemporary notions from the 1990's. Through them he builds an image of the ideas and attitudes Europeans had towards the tropics. Arnold starts from the concept of 'otherness', building upon Edward W. Said's theories on Orientalism<sup>10</sup>, where the Orient is constructed by the Occident as an Other: culturally and politically different and inferior to the West. Arnold argues that most interpretations of otherness have focused on non-Western people and culture rather than "the otherness of non-European environments"<sup>11</sup>. The distinction between temperate and tropical is one of the clearest places where environmental otherness becomes visible in European thought. One example of both the environmental and social juxtapositions between tropical and temperate was the depiction by western writers of the tropics as unsuited to civilization, while in opposition the temperate zones were portrayed as ideal for it. This belief prevailed until the 1950s. Arnold importantly notes how in western thought the tropics were described between two opposites: either as a *paradise*, with Edenic islands and rich vegetation, or as a *hell*, with diseases and storms.<sup>12</sup>

Tropicality has been discussed most importantly within the fields of geography, history and anthropology, although it does not rise from any single research discipline. Conceptualized relatively recently, the discussion is still active in the post-colonial context. However, it has not been discussed much within the context of the Arts or visual culture. Geographer Felix Driver notes that in addition to impacting discourses of exploration and travel, images of tropicality can be found widely in other

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9 Daniel Clayton, "Militant tropicality: war, revolution and the reconfiguration of 'the tropics' c.1940–c.1975." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 38, no 1 (2013): 180.

10 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

11 Arnold, *The Problem of Nature*, 141.

12 Ibid., 141–68.



cultural forms “from landscape painting and epic poetry to architecture and popular music”<sup>13</sup>. Geographer Denis Cosgrove reminds us that the influence of imaginative geographies which Europeans and peoples of the global North attach to the tropics has not diminished – they take form in tourism, product advertising and reality TV<sup>14</sup>. I consider that the influences of tropicality can be seen in the arts and more widely in contemporary, everyday culture, and claim that a similar way of thinking is still alive in Finland today.

I have noticed that as a term tropicality is not commonly known. When presenting my thesis idea in a seminar organized by my faculty, the word was easily misunderstood as referring to tropical things or elements *as such*, as a descriptive noun, not as a discourse or -ism. Some authors have used the concept ‘tropicalism’ – albeit ‘tropicality’ is more often used. In Finland historian Marjo Kaartinen translates tropicality as *tropikalismi* in her book *Neekerikammo. Kirjoituksia vieraan pelosta*<sup>15</sup>. The translation works well in my opinion, since it seems to refer to a thinking or meaning system. In this thesis I refer to ‘tropicality’, as it is the term more widely used in English literature.

### Research questions and data

My research questions are as follows: What kind of representations and uses of the tropical can be found in Finland? What are the typical or iconic imagery and vocabulary used when constructing the tropical/tropics? How has the ‘tropical’ influenced my personal artistic practice?

The data I have collected includes commercial places and products labeled as ‘tropical’, such as spas and botanical gardens and food and cleaning products. For clarity’s sake I have chosen to narrow the collected data to consider places and artefacts which are clearly advertised as ‘tropical’. A direct way to approach this, is to look at how the word ‘tropical’ or

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13 Felix Driver, “Tropicality,” in *Dictionary of Human Geography (5th Edition)*, ed. Derek Gregory et al. (Malden: Blackwell, 2009), 777.

14 Denis Cosgrove, “Tropic and Tropicality,” in *Tropical Visions in an Age of Empire*, ed. Felix Driver and Luciana Martins (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 197–98.

15 Marjo Kaartinen, *Neekerikammo. Kirjoituksia vieraan pelosta*. (Turku: k&h, University of Turku, 2004).

‘trooppinen’ (tropical in Finnish) and conjugations of these words are used explicitly in naming (e.g. *Tropiclandia* spa, *Tropical Müsli*). As Finnish is my native language this allows me to examine the language used with ‘tropical’. According to the data, I analyze how the tropical is represented: the recurrent imagery and language and their uses.

### Research scope and methods: discovering the ‘tropical’

The scope of my research is novel and the subject has not been much studied. In Finland writings on tropicality are rare and I have not found any Finnish artists working with these themes directly. The only references I found specifically to tropicality were by historian Marjo Kaartinen in her analysis of Finnish writers’ descriptions of Africa. Similarly to the findings of Arnold, Kaartinen noted tropicalist features in the texts; the African environments and nature were described in simplified ways following a paradise–hell dichotomy.<sup>16</sup> In her Master’s thesis in the field of sociology Anna Linna studied representations of Latin America in Finnish travel media, examining how Latin America is constructed in Finnish travel tour operators’ descriptions through Otherness<sup>17</sup>. I find a connection in Linna’s research frame to mine, since she does not position her study within Latin American studies, but rather examines Finnish and Western representations. Thus, her research takes part within the discourse of Finnish views of Otherness and the “Us vs. Them” power dynamics related to foreign cultures. Linna notes an example of this in the culture–nature dichotomy found in contemporary Finnish travel advertisements: tropical nature is advertised as astonishing and uncontrolled, while the Finnish traveler is seen as coming from an area of tranquil nature and advanced culture and technology.<sup>18</sup>

Within my artistic practice, I started working with tropical themes in early 2015: I used audio and video I recorded while traveling in Cuba, creating fictional video works inspired by these travels. Since then, my thinking

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16 Kaartinen, *Neekerikammo. Kirjoituksia vieraan pelosta*, 134–43.

17 Anna Linna, “*Kolumbuksen jalanjäljissä - Toiseuden representaatiot Latinalaisen Amerikan matkakohdekuvaussissa*” (MA thesis, University of Tampere, 2012); See also Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality : a Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Doubleday, 1967).

18 Linna, “*Kolumbuksen jalanjäljissä*,” 46.

has shifted to take a more critical direction, especially since becoming acquainted with the concept of *tropicality* in spring 2016. I found the concept first in a Wikipedia article on the tropics in English<sup>19</sup>. I am very thankful for the separate paragraph on tropicality being there; it lead me to this topic, redirected me to research the theme further and influenced my working. Nevertheless, when I later reread the paragraph in question, it felt a bit imprecise. Interestingly, in the same article on the Finnish Wikipedia page there was no mention of tropicality.

A Master's thesis is a chance to look back and analyze an artist's path and practice. For me it is relevant to do this through examining the influence of the travels I have made in the tropics, having found artistic material through themes related to the tropical and its artificial representations. I have traveled in seven countries situated in the tropical zone during the past four years. According to Finnish travel statistics, Finns travel mostly within Europe, although Thailand has risen in the statistics to become one of the most popular travelling sites among Finns<sup>20</sup>. On average, not many Finns have empirical experience on the tropics. But by no means do I claim to be an expert; I acknowledge that my view of the tropical is and will be the view of an outsider. I also recognize the problematics of my position as a white European artist, where I visit these environments and cultures and take influences from them into my artistic practice. Seen from that point of view, I walk in the same footsteps as earlier European artists capturing landscapes on their canvases or stories in their books. One such is Finnish artist Akseli Gallen-Kallela, who lived in Kenya from 1909 to 1911; this period resulted in a new phase of expressionism in his practice<sup>21</sup>. Historically some artists of the colonial era were not only gathering inspiration but also served colonial purposes (as in the Indies under the Dutch rule)<sup>22</sup>. What makes my current work different is the introspective overview I take towards my own culture: I consider how the

19 "Tropics," Wikipedia, accessed January 15, 2017, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tropics>.

20 "Ulkomaan vapaa-ajanmatkojen (yöpyminen kohdemaassa) suosituimmat kohdemaat vuonna 2016," Suomen virallinen tilasto (SVT): Suomalaisten matkailu, Tilastokeskus, accessed October 26, 2017, [http://www.stat.fi/til/smat/2016/smat\\_2016\\_2017-03-29\\_tau\\_005\\_fi.html](http://www.stat.fi/til/smat/2016/smat_2016_2017-03-29_tau_005_fi.html).

21 "Akselin aikajana," Gallen-Kallela Museum, accessed August 23, 2017, <http://www.gallen-kallela.fi/tietoa-gallen-kallelan-museosta/aikajana/>.

22 Susie Protschky, *Images of the Tropics* (Leiden: BRILL, 2011).

tropical is viewed in Finland, especially in its artificial representations.

My research is also connected to the very nature of the ViCCA MA program, in which I think discussion and thinking together are important. Many of the thinkers and scholars I have gotten to know during my studies are working outside of the art field. The subjects discussed have been wide, political and with a strong connection to the contemporary world. Of course the art world has also been on our agenda, but for me the focus has been more on how to discuss or deal with contemporary phenomena through the resources and methods of art. This education has opened new ways for me to see theory and knowledge production within the field and frame of art. Because of this, my thesis deals with issues and disciplines from various fields.

Outside of my scope, the issue of the artificial 'tropical' is wider and has relations to various aspects of life. There are places and findings in Finnish everyday life which can be viewed as constructing the tropical more implicitly than the examples I have chosen for my data. These places are not named tropical, but still construct the tropical in some manner, such as botanical gardens with tropical plants and constructed miniature tropical landscapes. While working with this thesis I have started to notice the 'tropical' "everywhere": shop windows, advertisement campaigns and posters for a "Tropical Party" and palm trees and other tropical plants used as decoration in public spaces. At the moment of writing this paragraph, I am sitting in a public library in Pasila (a suburb of Helsinki) and before me I see three big potted Kentia Palm trees which are framing an indoor fountain. I hear the constant gurgle of the fountain and sometimes pause to stare at the palm trees. I will not claim that all palm plants situated in Finnish interiors refer to the artificial tropical or that they were placed there to imply the tropics. Then again when analyzing how the word *tropical* is used in Finnish advertising, connections can be found: an article in a Finnish magazine *Me Naiset* presents "An impressive Kentia Palm tree creates a tropical atmosphere to the summer home, 69 €/190 cm, Ikea"<sup>23</sup>.

23 Pia Hollo, "Pihistä tai panosta: kesäkodin helppo päivitys," *Me Naiset*, May 25, 2017, "https://www.menaiset.fi/artikkeli/tyyli/koti/pihista-tai-panosta-kesakodin-helppo-paivitys. Original text in Finnish: "Näyttävä kentiapalmu tuo kesäkotiin trooppista tunnelmaa, 69 €/190 cm, Ikea".

“Creating atmosphere” and playing with mental images is something very key to the phenomenon of *‘Finnish tropical’*. But as these elements are much more difficult to define, I have chosen to narrow my scope to the explicitly ‘tropical’.

I will also note, that it is not only in Finland where these artificial tropical elements exist – I have encountered them in other parts of Europe as well – but I have chosen to narrow my data to only the Finnish context. It is the context I know most thoroughly, and furthermore I feel there is something very specific about the ‘Finnish tropical’.

I visited the ‘tropical’ places on site. When exploring the places, my method was to visit as a tourist and an artist gathering material: observing, taking photos and video, and experiencing the space with all senses. I observed from the point of view of the ‘tropical’: searching for the offered ‘tropical’ elements and examining how the ‘tropical’ is constructed. I wanted to explore the overall experience created for the visitor – from entering the place to exiting it. I noticed I also examined the places against my actual experiences traveling in the tropics, paying attention to whether the visits would resonate with my own experiences visiting tropical countries.

After the visits, I documented my experiences in written form. Methodologically, I followed a method of *descriptive aesthetics* by Arnold Berleant. It is a form of aesthetic inquiry which can be narrative, phenomenological, evocative and sometimes revelatory. Berleant sees it as a philosophical approach with theoretical importance which is particularly well suited to describing environments. The aesthetic environment is experienced with all sensory and bodily capacities.<sup>24</sup> Berleant also discusses how as cultural beings our sensations are never just physiological: “Besides associations there are meanings, bodily or cognitive, acquired or unlearned, that crowd in to color the scene”<sup>25</sup>. I include excerpts of my descriptions in the paragraph *The Artificial Tropics: places of vacationing and leisure*, and have attached one full version to the end of this thesis (in Finnish). I consider that this method worked well as I was aiming to gain a wider perception of the visited places and the experiences related to them. Berleant’s method was a starting point for my writing, but over the course

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24 Arnold Berleant, *The Aesthetics of Environment* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), 25–39.

25 Ibid., 28–29.

of working I adapted it to serve the needs of this thesis and my personal practice.

The ‘tropical’ products I found both by visiting Finnish grocery stores and searching the online databases of Finland’s biggest supermarket chains S-ryhmä and Kesko. I purchased a collection of some of these products and tasted and consumed them. I examine the packages and contents of the products.

My research could be seen as having similarities with the principles and methods of artistic research. As philosopher Juha Varto writes, bodily and sensory approaches and the artist’s self-experienced, hands-on knowledge are key ingredients for artistic research. Artistic research examines the world and its phenomena in various means. The methods of argumentation in artistic research aim for many-sided insight leaving room for the receiver to be active both intellectually and in their actions.<sup>26</sup> In my practice, bodily and sensory approaches are very important. That is why I chose to personally visit as many of the places as possible, consuming the products and making observations with all of my senses. In this study I describe my findings, and continue with them in my exhibition (described more in chapter 4).

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26 Juha Varto, *Taiteellinen tutkimus. Mitä se on? Kuka sitä tekee? Miksi?* (Helsinki: Aalto ARTS Books, 2017).

## 2. Analysis: tracing 'tropical' imagery and vocabulary

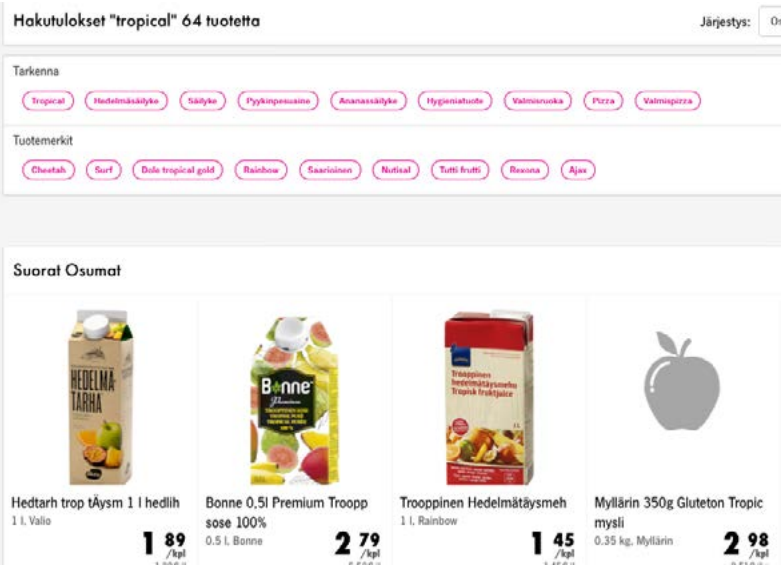
### 'Tropical' products – the fruity and flowery

There are various products labeled as 'tropical' in the Finnish grocery stores and supermarkets. Both the English word and the Finnish, 'trooppinen', are in use; some variations are also found such as 'tropic' and 'tropiikki', which translates to "the tropics". The products include a typical *Tropical juice* or canned *Trooppinen hedelmäsalaatti* (Tropical fruit salad) but also include more surprising combinations like *Tropical Müsli*, *Tropical* car air freshener, *Tropical* deodorant or *Tropiikki 3in1* toilet freshener. The majority of the products in my data are manufactured by Finnish companies, with a few exceptions made by German, French and U.S. manufacturers. Below I have listed all the products found by November 14th 2017, in the same precise form as they are listed in the product search databases:

Ajax 500ml Tropical Breeze käsitiskiaine  
 AMWalls Idealdecor valokuvatapetti Ile Tropicale 00241,  
 8-osainen, 366 x 254 cm  
 AMWalls Idealdecor valokuvatapetti Tropical Pathway 00438,  
 4-osainen, 183 x 254 cm  
 Batiste kuivashampoo 50ml Tropical  
 Bi-es Woman Edp tropical summer  
 Bonne 0,5l Premium Trooppinen sose 100%  
 Cheetah Tropical treenitrikoot  
 Clif Shot 60g energiaviinikumi trooppinen  
 Deluxe PrimaCat 4x50g Tropical Tuna Collection, tonnikala-kana  
 ja tonnikala-merilevä-shirasu hyytelö  
 Dole 3x227/139g Pizsaan ja tacoihin sopivia pieniä Tropical Gold  
 ananaspaloja omassa mehussa  
 Dole Tropical Gold 227/139g Aamiaissekoitus, Tropical Gold  
 ananaspaloja ja mandariinilohkoja mehussa  
 Dole Tropical Gold 227/139g Ananaspaloja mehussa  
 Dole Tropical Gold 227/139g Pina Colada, Ananaspaloja ja  
 kookosgeelipaloja ananasmehussa  
 Dole Tropical Gold 227/139g Trooppiset hedelmät, Ananas,  
 papaija ja guava paloja mehussa  
 DPC Tropical Tuna-salmon 50g, kissanruoka  
 Dylon 350g Tropical Green tekstiiliväri  
 Electrolux s-fresh Tropical tuoksurakeet  
 Fazer Tutti frutti tropical island mix 350g  
 Finlayson Tropiikkimuumi pussilakana pastellipinkki  
 Gillette 3kpl Venus Tropical varsiterä  
 Go-Tan Tropical mango&ananas makea chilikastike 215ml  
 H2O Tropical Zest tuoksu  
 Herbina huulivoide 10ml Lip Candy Tropical Raspberry  
 HiPP Luomu Trooppinen mangomix 190g 6kk  
 innocent 360ml super smoothie trooppinen & proteiini  
 Innocent 900ml trooppinen mehu  
 IsaDora 1,2g Perfect Lipliner 35 Tropical Pink rajuuskynä  
 Leader Kick BCAA tropical 0,5l  
 Lipton Tropical Fruit Tea 20 pyramidipussia 36g  
 Marli Hyvinvointijuoma 2,5dl Vahvistava trooppiset hedelmät  
 Maxim 480g Sports Drink Fresh tropical hedelmänmakuinen  
 urheilujuomajauhe  
 Mehuiza 100% trooppinen täysmehu 0,2L

Moilas pizza 320g tropicana gluteeniton  
 Myllärin 350g Gluteeniton Tropical mysli  
 Naked protein tropical punch smoothie 450ml  
 Natusan Kids 200ml Tropical Shower & Shampoo suihkugeeli  
 NIVEA 150ml Hello Sunshine! Tropical Fruit Deo Spray  
 -antiperspirantti  
 NOCCO BCAA 330ml Tropical, aminohappoja, kofeiinia ja  
 vitamiineja sisältävä hiilihapotettu juoma.  
 Nutisal 60g Tropical Mix pähkinäsekoitus  
 Nutrilett 330 ml Tasty Tropical 30 % vähemmän sokeria  
 Smoothie ateriankorvike  
 Piltti Taapero 25g Trooppinen välipalapatukka 1v  
 Pirkka huuhteluainetiiviste tropical fruits 750ml  
 Pirkka trooppinen hedelmäriisi 175 g  
 Planti 2x150g Tropical Fruits sovgurt  
 Rainbow Trooppinen hedelmätäysmehu 1 l  
 Rainbow Trooppinen Zn+E juoma 1,5 l  
 Rainbow Tropical hedelmäpalat mehussa 400/250 g  
 Rainbow Tropical mix 130.00 gram  
 Rexona 250ml Tropical Power suihkusaippua  
 Rexona Girl 50ml Tropical Power roll on  
 Rynkeby täysmehu 1l tropical  
 Saarioinen 420g pizza tropical dream pizza ananaksella ja  
 savustetulla sianlihastulla sekä chilimajoneesilla  
 Sallinen tropicalmix 400g  
 Santa Maria Tropical salsa 230g  
 Semper 190g Aurinkohedelmiä & jogurtia alkaen 8kk välipala  
 Skyr-juoma 300ml trooppiset hedelmät  
 Surf 1L Tropical Lily & Ylang  
 Surf 2L Tropical Lily & Ylang Ylang pyykinpesuneste  
 täyttöpakkaus  
 Surf 3,42kg Tropical Lily Ylang Ylang pyykinpesujauhe  
 Take away Mysli 90g tropical  
 Tesco 330ml trooppinen hedelmämeijuoma  
 Tropical Mysli, Rainbow  
 Tropicana Pure Premium® 1 l Original  
 Valio Hedelmätarha Tropiikki täysmehu 1l  
 WC-Kukka 50g Tropiikki 3in1 geeli wc-raikastin  
 Wunder-Baum Clip Tropical

The quantity of these products is quite impressive. The most common connecting factor between the ‘tropical’ products is the inclusion of “tropical fruits”. Analyzing the product descriptions further, these fruits are a specific selection and do not include all imaginable fruits of the tropical zone. The fruits are typically: orange, pineapple, banana, mango, papaya, coconut and passion fruit. These fruits are commonly known in Finland. Importantly the tropical fruits are presented in plural, and as a mix. It is more common to see for example fruit juices with “tropical fruits” as opposed to the singular “tropical pineapple”. The word “exotic” is also used with “exotic fruits” and in the Finnish context both the “tropical fruits” and “exotic fruits” seem to refer to the same fruits. I also became interested in whether ‘tropical’ is ever linked with vegetables and made a search for “tropical vegetables” (trooppiset vihannekset), but this did not result in any findings. This makes visible the strong role of fruits, and especially the concept of “tropical fruits”, as a building block for the construction of the ‘tropical’.



Screenshot of a search for “tropical”, leading to 64 products.

All of the products found under a “tropical” search are packaged products. The package designs follow a quite similar style. The recurrent and dominant imagery in the food packages are of fruits, most often oranges, bananas, passion fruits, pineapples, and sometimes coconuts, mangos, apples and guavas. Commonly they are presented in still life arrangements of at least two different fruits but more often at least four different varieties are present. In the packages of cleaning products and washing detergents the most prevailing subjects are flowers (Pulmeria, Strelizia, Hibiscus, Orchid) possibly with leaves of palm trees in the background. Most of the images are illustrations and less commonly photographs. Often the backgrounds seem a bit foggy with gradient colors. Clear images of landscapes, locations or maps are not used. An exception to this is a scented candle titled *Tropic cooldown Fraîcheur tropicale*, which has a photograph of two foldable chairs under a parasol and its shade, on a sandy beach with turquoise sea and sky. Most of the packages are brightly multicolored. The colors are not primary colors or not quite pastel-like, but appear more as sun-bleached. The most common color seems to be light orange. One remarkable finding is that no images of people could be found on the packages.

The scents and tastes of these products can be generally described as sweet, fruity and fresh. There are only few salty products among the ‘tropical’ groceries. The word ‘tropical’ is sometimes used to actually describe a taste or a scent in itself: something tastes and smells *tropical*. Among others examples of this are Rainbow’s drink *Trooppinen Z<sub>n</sub>+E* “trooppisen makuinen hiilihapotettu juoma” (tropical-tasting carbonated drink), Maxim *Sports Drink Fresh tropical taste* or Gillette *Tropical* razor, which has a “tropical scented handle”.

Often the ‘tropical’ is offered as refreshing, a way to endure the long Finnish winter. An example of this is the Finnish company Fazer’s *#trooppisetbileet* (#tropicalparty) campaign, which encourages people to organize a “Tropical party” during the Finnish winter by serving their ‘tropically’ themed candies.

One recurrent subject in the tropical imagery is the palm tree. It is on the cover of a *Tropical drink* soda, a shape on a *Tropical Island Mix* candy, on the logo of *Tropicario* zoo, as a pattern in *Tropical* training tights, and there are many plastic replicas decorating spas or interiors of various

Finnish public spaces, to name a few. Landscape architect M. SelÇuk Sayan claims that "palms are the universal symbol of the tropics in the popular imagination" since they remind people of warm weather, the sea and holidays. An exotic ambience can be created in both outdoor and indoor spaces with the use of palms.<sup>27</sup> Some historical background for the palm tree's rise to an iconic motif can be found in 19th century landscape art. Art historian Katherine Manthorne studied several North American painters' interpretations of Latin American landscapes of that era and notes that the palm tree was a recurrent motif in their works. Manthorne draws a connection between artists' wishes to find and portray these landscapes as edenic and paradisaical, suggesting the palm tree as an important symbol in reference to the biblical Tree of Life.<sup>28</sup>

Later on the image of paradise seems to shift from biblical to more earthly. As ethnologist Orvar Löfgren notes "-- the whole concept of paradise relies above all on the romance of the South Pacific and the tropical beach" and palm trees became an essential element of tourist beaches after the mass tourism boom at Hawaii's Waikiki beach in the 1950's<sup>29</sup>. Possibly from there onwards the palm tree ventured along its way to the popular imagery, appearing in tourist brochures and eventually even as far as in a logo of a Finnish reptile zoo.

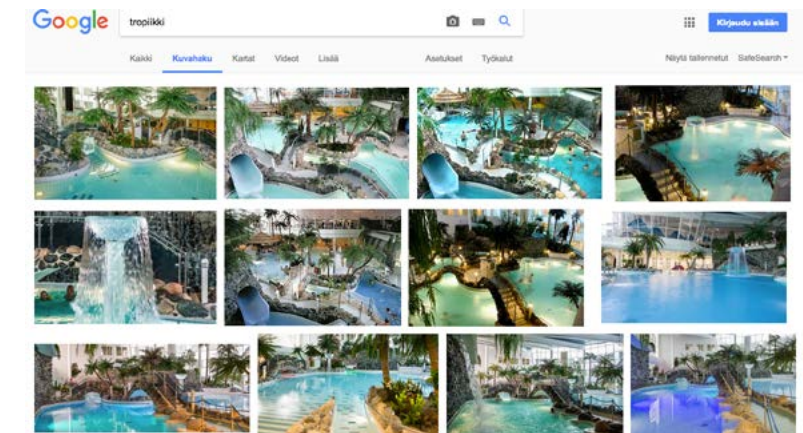
27 M. SelÇuk Sayan, "Landscaping with Palms in the Mediterranean", *Journal of the International Palm Society*, Volume 45, no. 4 (2001): 171–76.

28 Katherine Manthorne, "The Quest for a Tropical Paradise: Palm Tree as a Fact and Symbol in Latin American Landscape Imagery, 1850-1875", *Art Journal* 44, (Winter 1984): 374–82. One clear example of this is Thomas Cole's painting *Garden of Eden* (1828; now lost).

29 Orvar Löfgren, *On Holiday. A History of Vacationing* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 216.

## The 'artificial tropics': places of vacationing and leisure

The places in my data all construct images and interpretations of the tropical, creating 'artificial tropics'. These places are situated in different parts of Finland. The 'tropical' places include *Kuusamon Tropicikki* (*Tropics of Kuusamo*) spa hotel in Kuusamo, *Tropiclandia* water amusement park in Vaasa, *Tropicario* reptile zoo in Helsinki, *Botania* tropical butterfly garden in Joensuu and *Gardenia* tropical garden in Helsinki. I have studied these places through their websites and by visiting personally all of them except Kuusamon Tropicikki.



*Kuusamon Tropicikki spa hotel is the dominating result if you make an image search on Finnish Google with the word 'tropicikki'; the top 12 images are all from there<sup>30</sup>. Might this already tell something of the prevailing conceptions of the tropics in the Finnish context?*

Regarding the relationship of work and leisure during these visits, I was sort of in between both. I was actively conducting research, but, an essential part of experiencing these places is through relaxing, resting and actively participating in the invigorating actions they offer, like swimming or observing plants and animals. Visits to these places reconstruct a miniature holiday within the few hours spent there. Spatially and visually they are very different from everyday Finnish life settings and offer a lot for the senses.

30 Google images, accessed October 31, 2017, <https://images.google.fi/>.

What connects these places is that they are all commercial leisure centers, are built indoors and have man-made climates. They are open throughout the year and seem to be very popular especially during the winter season. All of these places are advertised as family destinations. Most importantly these places differ from each other in that some serve an educational purpose and others are purely for pleasure. I see that botanical gardens and zoos have an educating purpose, whereas spas and the water amusement park are primarily for sensory and bodily impact, pure leisure and fun.

So what is a spa experience like when it is framed as ‘tropical’? My first visit for this study was to *Katinkulta* spa in Kainuu region, over Easter in 2017. *Katinkulta* is not named ‘tropical’, but when entering the pool area I noticed a sign on the wall: “In the tropical spa, there is a digital camera surveillance system.” I explored the place from this point of view, as a ‘tropical’ place. After the visit I reconstructed my experience textually following loosely the method of *descriptive aesthetics* by Arnold Berleant<sup>31</sup>. The quotes that follow in this chapter are from these texts. I wrote in Finnish but have translated them here into English:

*I get up from the pool and lay on a sunbed. There's nobody on the other chairs or in the palm tree huts beside me. It feels cold to sit on a metal chair, my wet swimming suit sticks to my skin and the backrest presses against my shoulder blades. But the weirdest thing is to lay on a beach chair without a beach. I wonder what it is that's actually happening here. At least the Finnish nature stays outside. There are no fake birch trees indoors and the turquoise tiles want to resemble seas faraway. They have been borrowed from somewhere and the rest has been imagined. This is what holiday looks like, how holiday feels, all the necessary characteristics are here. Of course, we recognize the artificial features but we accept them since in return we get to float in warm waters. I watch the plastic palm trees arching over me and think: when was this place founded and how long will this exist. Or other fake worlds: botanical gardens, zoos or plastic jungles. Will spas be around longer than coral reefs?*<sup>32</sup>

Touring or wandering are key ways the visitors move in these places. For example, in *Botania* I could independently follow a planned tour with the help of a printed brochure guiding my route. The surrounding sensory

31 Berleant, *The Aesthetics of Environment*, 25–39.

32 The complete text can be found as an attachment in the end of this thesis (in Finnish).

inputs and movement through the spaces form the experience in a central way:

*The air surrounds my body, I feel it warm on my skin and moist in my breathing. The smells of the plants and moistened air mix. I start to roam the greenhouses following the info paper I received from the cashier. Coffee tree, mango, orchids, black pepper, cocoa, Monstera Deliciosa... I first associate this place with other botanical gardens I have visited in other cities and countries, but soon after this I feel a sudden longing for Indonesia where I have seen some of these plants growing wild. Here the plants are plentiful, side by side, in the middle of the space they grow directly on the floor, on the sides of the spaces they are planted in pots as in Finnish homes. There is a Coleus, the same kind I have at our home. I take out my camera. The lens and screen steam up and the first images become blurred.*

*Tropicario* is in a way exceptional in my data, since it is the only place presenting the possible thrilling or scary elements of the tropics. This “Tropical Animal House” (*Trooppinen eläintalo*) invites the visitor to “Step into the Tropics” advertising it by saying: “See the world’s most poisonous snakes, look into the eyes of giant multimetre snakes.” But the frightening aspects are not raised up more than this and the safety of the visitor is assured: “Through the glasswalls it is safe and fun to observe the activities of *Tropicario*’s animals.”<sup>33</sup> When visiting *Tropicario* I first examined the place by its outer features, such as the visual elements and info-texts used. But during the visit I got nervous and a bit frightened, and realized it was the first time those emotions rose in any of the ‘tropical’ places I had visited. It was a combination of knowing the dangerousness of the animals and the strange atmosphere floating in the space:

*It feels as if time has stopped in Tropicario. Most of the animals are completely still in their terrariums, there are hardly any visitors other than me, the stony-faced worker is maintaining the cages quietly and again all the plants (also inside the terrariums) are plastic.*

33 Fin. “Näe maailman myrkyllisimpiä käärmeitä, katso monimetristä kuristajaa silmästä silmään.”, “Lasiseinän läpi on turvallista ja hauskaa havainnoida eläinten touhuja.”

*Tropicario*, accessed October 12, 2017, <http://www.tropicario.com/>.



Still the place seems to do well, at least among families. It was chosen as the best family attraction in Helsinki in 2008<sup>34</sup>.

Not all 'tropical' places thrive as well as others, commercially or organically. *Gardenia* in Helsinki is an interesting case study example of this: it used to be a 'tropical garden', open to the public since 2001, but was closed in 2015 because it became too expensive to maintain. Nevertheless, new buyers are now being sought and the place still exists, with some of the plants left to survive by themselves in the triangular glass house.<sup>35</sup> I visited *Gardenia* in 2014 and 2015 when it was still operating. Back then it was blooming with all kinds of tropical plants from different parts of the tropical zone. I also visited it in 2017 after the closing. Then I could only see the building from outdoors, but even through the glass walls the drastic change was evident:

*I see a huge, completely dried palm tree in the middle of the empty glass house, climbing plants burned by the sun, an empty pool where the carps used to swim, dried bushes and leaves covering the floor. Surprisingly some succulent plants are still living. I imagine the moment when the last leaving worker closed the glass door behind themselves and had the final glimpse of the remaining plants. I cannot bare to watch. I turn to look down at my shoes and notice a dry palm trunk on the outdoor ground. I take a deep breath in.*

The sight made me very sad, foremost because the place felt completely abandoned. This visit materialized for me how much care and maintenance is needed for living tropical plants to survive in Finland.

34 Ibid.

35 Vilma-Lotta Lehtinen, "Viikin Gardenian kasviloistosta on jäljellä vain muutama kuivunut karahka – Trooppisesta puutarharhasta [sic] tuli autiotalo, nyt paikalle halutaan asuntoja" *Helsingin Sanomat*, July 3, 2017, <http://www.hs.fi/kaupunki/art-2000005277279.html?share=fd130844e888206c8f7dd96bb75be3a5>.





*Tropicario, 11.10.2017.*



*Gardenia, 26.4.2015.*



*Gardenia (closed for public,) 5.5.2017.*



One distinct feature of these ‘tropical’ places is that the local inhabitants and people of the tropics are hardly represented. In the interiors of the places I looked at I could only trace two examples: on the wall of *Tropiclandia*’s dressing room there was a painting of a colonialist expedition with explorer boats arriving to a shore with palm trees, and meeting indigenous people on the beach; and in Botania I found posters advertising Fair trade and Nuukuusviikko (Scarcity Week) with images of people.

Visiting ‘tropical’ attractions is offered as an alternative to traveling to tropical countries. A text found on the web page of Botania states: “No need to fly to the tropics, when you can find the plants and warmth of the tropics from Botania”<sup>36</sup>. John Urry writes about the “tourist gaze” and produced and *themed* environments. These places (such as theme parks, themed malls or world expos) seem to form a certain hyper-reality that is constructed through concrete staging, such as constructed settings where visitors can stroll, sense and gaze around. Themed attractions might evolve around a particular theme, or even fuse various cultural themes within a relatively small space. Thus the real geography of the globe is blurred, and physically distant places can all be experienced under one roof. The practice of tourist photography and other media such as TV and literature add to this, resulting in tourist expectations and daydreams.<sup>37</sup>

‘Tropical’ iconography has similarities with the concept of *vacationing* and holiday images. Orvar Löfgren examines vacationing and tourism as an important part of modern life both as a way to spend leisure time and as a strongly structured global industry. According to Löfgren, the contemporary tourists have learned how to be tourists over the course of the last two centuries. Vacations are often constructed in terms of cultural differences. The tourist is in search of something that differs from their own origin, driven by an urge for new experiences and understandings. The world of marketing has understood the value of both advertising otherness and producing an *experience*.<sup>38</sup> Catherine Cocks notes that as newspapers started having travel sections and printing more advertisements and graphics in 1920’s USA, millions were influenced by them even

36 ”Tropiikkiin ei tarvitse matkustaa lentämällä, sillä tropiikin kasvit ja lämpö löytyvät Botaniasta.” ”Etusivu,” Botania, accessed September 1, 2017, <http://www.botania.fi>.

37 John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze* (London: SAGE, 2002).

38 Löfgren, *On Holiday*.



View from *Tropiclandia*’s dressing room, 24.10.2017.



A painting on the wall of *Tropiclandia*’s dressing room.

though many "would never eat strawberries in December in Mexico." Tropicality had its influences not so much through actual experience but through representation.<sup>39</sup> According to Löfgren, even today the evocative and symbolic load of vacationing is vast; evoking utopias, idealism and disappointments in tourists. The important cultural skills of daydreaming and mindtraveling are practiced during a vacation and outside of it in the everyday, when remembering a past holiday or when planning for a new one. "Here is an arena in which fantasy has become an important social practice" Löfgren emphasizes.<sup>40</sup>

Löfgren writes on the origins of the 'global beach' and 'tropical dream', and how they are both derived from perceptions of Hawaii. Sandy beaches and sand were branded as a "natural" element, even though truckloads of white, powdery sand were imported to many beaches in order to meet the expectations of beach vacationers.<sup>41</sup> This reveals the artificiality behind the concept of 'beach': even though for many sandy beaches represent a natural environment, they have also often been constructed both physically and in our imaginations.

I will side-track now shortly to a Swedish tropical representation, because I consider it important to opening up the vacationing point of view. In 1975, the Swedish band ABBA published a song called *Tropical Loveland*, whose lyrics are a clear example of how even a positive image of the tropical can still be very narrow when seen from a visitor's point of view:

*Come to my loveland, wander along  
Beautiful gardens full of flowers and songs  
Come to the sunshine, beaches and sand  
Here's the two bluebirds, won't you come to my land  
The grass is mellow and the sky is blue  
My paradise is waiting here for you  
Oh, it's a tropical loveland  
Oh, I want to share it with you  
Life can be funny  
Happy and sunny  
Oh, in my tropical loveland*

*(ABBA: Tropical Loveland, 1975)*

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39 Catherine Cocks, *Tropical Whites: The Rise of the Tourist South in the Americas* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 11.

40 Löfgren, *On Holiday*, 7.

41 Ibid, 216–21.

## 'Tropical' vocabulary

The word “tropical” is most often used as a descriptive adjective. In the ‘tropical’ products it appears very generally such as in the product *Trooppinen sose* (trans. Tropical purée) or *Trooppinen välipalapatukka* (trans. Tropical snack bar), but it is also used evocatively like *Tropical Dream* pizza, *Trooppinen Paratiisi* (trans. Tropical Paradise) coloring book or *Tropical Island Mix* candy mix. Here we can find a continuation of the recurring stereotypical images of the tropical as something dreamy and paradisiacal.

I have found four concepts that occur frequently in relation to the ‘tropical’: “Tropical Fruits”, “Tropical Dream”, “Tropical Paradise” and “Tropical Breeze”. I will now analyze more the concept of the “Tropical Breeze”, since also the Finnish “tuulahdus” meaning a light breeze, is often paired with the word tropical. It is used to suggest that a ‘tropical’ element could bring a metaphorical breeze from the tropics all the way to Finland. One example is the *Tropical Raspberry* lip balm by Finnish cosmetics brand Herbina, which promises to bring the breeze straight to your lips. Another product materializes this metaphor in a tangible way: S-fresh *Tropical Breeze* air freshener granules promise a “fresh scent” while vacuuming your home. As the granules are vacuumed their scent spreads into the air through the vacuum cleaner’s ventilation system. A warm, artificial ‘tropical’ breeze emerges.

The concept of an all-year summer seems to be embedded in the ‘Finnish tropical’. I found it, for example, on the websites of Tropiclandia and Tropicario on their websites. Tropiclandia advertises itself by saying “We always have summer!” (“Meillä on aina kesä!”), and Tropicario promises “--an eternal summer that is not dependent on the outside weather” (“--ulkoilmasta riippumaton ainainen kesä”).

As a comparison, I tried a search with a few other climatic terms: “arctic”, “subtropical”, “Mediterranean”, and “temperate”. “Arctic” produced a few matches but only four different products. The Finnish word “arktinen” did not result in any matches. “Mediterranean” resulted in one and the equivalent in Finnish “välimerellinen” also in one. “Subtropical” and “temperate” did not result in any findings. Of any climatic or cartographic terms, it appears that “tropical” is used most commonly.



Screenshot from Tropiclandia's webpage.

### 3. Conclusions: commercial uses and appealing images of the 'tropical'

Through the analysis I have shown, I claim that the 'tropical' is a notable construction in the Finnish context, and that the 'tropical' is widely used for commercial purposes in Finland. Among the products and places I examined the 'tropical' seems to be represented as exotic, appealing and positive. Certain elements have been branded for the Finnish eyes and ears so as to be recognizable as tropical, forming images of the tropics. *Fruits, sun bleached colors, relaxing, holiday, palm tree, "eternal summer", warmth, sand, beach, swimming...* These elements recur throughout my data and they all have a strong appeal to the senses. I map the 'Finnish tropical' as something that borrows from authentic features found in the tropics, but that ends up being imaginary or at least very selected and thus narrow. Löfgren has noted that the material setting and vocabulary of vacation worlds and tour packages are constructed with a constant process of "borrowing and adaptation". Standardization and fusion of mixed elements from different cultural origins create a certain lingua franca, both visually and linguistically.<sup>42</sup> The Finnish artificial 'tropical' is also formed through these "borrowing and adaptation" processes and fusions.

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<sup>42</sup> Löfgren, *On Holiday*, 193–94.

James R. Ryan claims “--it seems that the further away one travels from ‘the tropical’ the greater its imaginative resonance becomes”<sup>43</sup>. Distance from the tropics increases imaginary conceptions of the area. And as the region in question is so wide, generalizations often take place. Although cartographical and climatic term, the ‘tropical’ in Finland most often seems to have vague and unlocated connotations. The ‘tropical’ seems to function as a backdrop or a stage for escapism.

The ‘tropical’ is used in Finland most visibly in contexts of commerce and consumption. ‘Tropical’ is used as a label, characterizing objects or places. The element of naming – for example a type of a müsli as tropical – plays an important part in this. The commercial places or products using tropical imagery are constructed with essentialized elements, presenting tropical and the tropics very optimistically as a “paradise”. In the commercial context it feels as if the ‘tropics’ are synonymous with paradise, ‘tropical’ for paradisiacal. Susie Protschky, who studied Dutch painters of the colonial era in the Indies, noted how their images were guiding colonial audiences’ gazes away from “conquest, conflict, violence, exploitation and coercion onto an altogether more attractive and uncomplicated prospect”<sup>44</sup>. Similarly, I see commercial producers guiding consumers’ minds to simplified images of the tropical. It is not in the scope of this thesis to make generalizations about how the Finns understand the tropics, or if they accumulate knowledge based on advertisements or visits to artificial ‘tropical’ places. Still it seems evident that in relation to the ‘tropical’ commercial agents are focusing on aspects that Finland lacks and what Finnish people might dream of: warmth, sun, fruits and relaxation. Could it be that during the Finnish winter the ‘Finnish tropical’ reaches its highest glory?

There are often amusing, absurd and contradictory features in the ‘Finnish tropical’. One could conclude that the ‘Finnish tropical’ is a multifruit-tasting, orange-colored cocktail enjoyed while relaxing in 32°C degree spa water, under plastic palm trees.

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43 James R. Ryan, “Views in a Warm Climate: Reflections on Images of the Tropics. A commentary on Felix Driver’s ‘Imagining the Tropics: Views and Visions of the Tropical World’”, *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 25, no. 1 (2004): 18.

44 Protschky, *Images of the Tropics*, 149.

As Felix Driver argues, tropical nature has been seen “as a counterpoint to all that is modest, civilized or cultivated – or, in a word, ‘normal’.” In the modern world “images of tropical difference” continue constructing the commodity advertising and iconography of luxury traveling.<sup>45</sup> Following this, ‘tropical’ is used in Finland as a way to make aspects that are uncommon for Finns distinct, to differentiate elements not found in Finnish nature, agriculture or culture, and to exotify. It is worth emphasizing that humans and culture are missing from these constructions of the ‘Finnish tropical’. Local inhabitants are quite absent in ‘tropical’ imagery. ‘Tropical’ products and places are created and advertised with images of flora, and occasional fauna, but never people or inhabitants of the tropics. Nations and names of countries are not usually mentioned when the ‘tropical’ is used in marketing. I see this as contributing to the idea of the tropical as an environmental other.

### **Appropriating the tropical?**

Arnold has noted that latest from the 18th century onwards the Europeans’ relationship towards the tropics has been quite appropriate. Europeans aimed to manipulate tropical environments and their inhabitants: the plants, the animals and the people. Under European expansion, tropical lands were to serve wishes and needs that temperate lands could not fulfill, leading to a strong control of natural resources, slavery, and a mastery of ‘tropical diseases’. Economic and medical purposes lead to the exploitation of tropical plants. The tropical world’s identity and function was seen by European eyes as increasingly tied to producing valuable products for export, such as sugar, coffee, or cotton.<sup>46</sup> In the post-colonial, contemporary era a lot may have changed, but “old” ways of thinking and acting might still prevail and exist. The use of ‘tropical’ for commercial purposes – as a way to promote business – leads to questions of appropriation.

There was an interesting case at the University of Saskatchewan. The Arts and Science Students Union organized a party with the title “Hawaiian Night”, with a picture of a hula girl on the poster. The event was criticized by some of the students for cultural appropriation. The event organizers responded to the critique by changing the name to “Tropical Night”

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45 Driver, “Tropicality,” 777.

46 Arnold, *The Problem of Nature*, 162–68.

and replacing the hula girl with a picture of a palm tree.<sup>47</sup> I think this demonstrates an ambivalence and certain neutrality in association with the concept of the tropical.

In Finland conversations about appropriation in the cultural sphere and media have centered around cultural appropriation and othering of racialized people in the Finnish context<sup>48</sup>. These discussions bring up important topics related to Finnish normativity and racism, but also shed light on Finnish cultural products, where some Finnish artists or writers have produced othering representations of marginalized groups<sup>49</sup>. In the case of appropriating the tropics or the tropical, I see that the issue gets quite complicated. In factual terms, the word tropical does not refer to any singular culture, but rather to environmental conditions. This brings up a question that would require further studying: how are the tropics represented or constructed in the Finnish cultural field?

Regarding my research and working, I have to ask myself the same types of questions: how have I constructed the tropical? How has my view shifted during the time I have worked with these themes? Am I contributing to the process of othering? At least my aim is the opposite: by tracing a bigger picture of the 'tropical' and tropicity in Finland, possibly some old thinking patterns and power structures can be dismantled, bringing important issues into discussion. Let us continue and take a look at my artistic work.

47 Scott Davidson, "Tropical night controversy brings cultural misappropriation to U of S," *The Sheaf*, January 23, 2014, <http://thesheaf.com/2014/01/23/tropical-night-controversy-brings-cultural-misappropriation-to-u-of-s/>.

48 See for example Koko Hubara, *Ruskeat Tytöt*. (Helsinki: Like, 2017), and discussion between Sonja Saarikoski and Sonya Lindfors: Sonja Saarikoski, "Sonya & Sonja eli se pieni ero," in *Jotkut taas väittävät*, ed. Noora Vaarala (Helsinki: Suomen Kulttuurirahasto, 2017), <http://www.jotkuttaasvaittavat.fi/sonya-sonja-eli-se-pieni-ero/>.

49 See for example the case of artist Jenni Hiltunen using fake Sami costumes and Jamaican Dance Hall in her video at Kiasma, and on cultural appropriation at large in English: Paula Korte, "Regarding the Appropriation of the Pain of Others", *Mustekala*, accessed July 20, 2017, <https://www.mustekala.info/node/37725>.



*Interpretation of the 'Finnish tropical' by Sanna Ritvanen.*



## 4. My 'tropical' works

In my artistic practice I have worked with themes related to the tropics since January 2015. In this chapter, I explore how my artistic practice has been influenced by both

- 1) the travels I have made and
- 2) the theoretical and practical aspects I have encountered during the thesis project.

These works expand my thinking from strictly analytical to more experiential dimensions. They can be seen as tangible experiments in understanding the phenomenon I have outlined in this thesis. Most importantly, I trace the process and development of my thinking: from admiring the tropical to examining the 'tropical'.

A retrospective of my works on the tropical and 'tropical'

- June 2015 *Yllätysparatiisi / Surprise Paradise*, solo exhibition at Oksasenkatu 11 Gallery, Helsinki
- December 2015 *Visuality > Performance*, workshop and artist talk at Gallery Ruang Gerilya, Bandung, Indonesia
- May 2016 *Tropical Dreams*, video essay (course work for an essay video course)<sup>50</sup>
- July 2016 *Tropical Room*, installation in a group exhibition, Porin kulttuurisäätiö, Pori
- May 2017 *Lotus Pond*, site-specific installation in a group exhibition, Space Invaders V, Tampere
- June 2017 *Lilluja muovipalmujen alla* (Floating under plastic palm trees), performance, Sorbus gallery, Helsinki
- December 2013- *Tropical Rooms*, ongoing photo series
- December 2017 *Touching palm trees, artificial waves, 'tropical' dreams*, thesis exhibition, Asematila, Helsinki

In my earliest works, I did not have a conscious or a critical tone. My thinking took a more self-aware turn at the end of 2015 while I was visiting *Ruang Gerilya* art gallery in Bandung, Indonesia. I was leading a workshop, presenting my video works and giving an artist talk, and I had the chance to discuss my work with local artists there. One of the artists I spoke with said my video work *Birds of Paradise* reminded him of Miami (rather than Indonesia), and asked whether I was disappointed in the Indonesian scenery I had encountered. I assured him that I was on the contrary very impressed with what I had seen in Indonesia, but also

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50 Screened only in a private screening within the course (Aalto, Media Lab).

realized after his comment that my work could be read as an idealized image of the tropical. I started to think about my position in relation to this topic more widely. Quite shortly after returning in the spring of 2016 I attended a course on video and film essays. I had shot plenty of video material in Indonesia and wanted to continue my pondering through a short video essay dealing with "the Tropics". But when I started to gather information, I quickly stumbled upon the discourse and problematics of tropicality. Since then my interests and focus of work have shifted towards the artificial and constructed 'tropical'.

I analyze the two works that are most important in relation to my thesis: the exhibition *Yllätysparatiisi / Surprise Paradise* and the multidisciplinary installation *Tropical Room*. I also write separately on my thesis exhibition.

## Yllätysparatiisi / Surprise Paradise exhibition

In January 2015, I travelled in Cuba for one month. The social patterns, ways of living, atmospheres, and surroundings which I encountered were very different from what I had experienced before, on many levels.<sup>51</sup> Focusing on visual elements, the use of color had a big impact on me in Cuba. It was most evident in how the houses were painted and how their interiors were decorated. Bright purples, pinks, oranges, greens or turquoises were not uncommon indoors or out. I experienced much warmth and not only because of the climate. In my practice and thinking, the element of encounters and meeting between people has been important for a long time, but I think this notion grew stronger over this month spent in Cuba.

These notions – and the travel as a whole – influenced strongly my solo exhibition *Yllätysparatiisi / Surprise Paradise* (Oksasenkatu 11 gallery in Helsinki, June 2015). In the exhibition description I mentioned tropical landscapes and birds of paradise as influencing on my work. I exhibited two video works: *Birds of Paradise* explored the dances of birds of paradise and these birds as metaphorical creatures. It was filmed with four dancer-performers enacting their own transformation rituals. *Kuuban kukkasia* (*Flowers of Cuba*) was filmed in Cuba, focusing on the multiple artificial flowers and floral motifs in accommodation interiors by my partner Mikko Piispa smelling them.

The videos were surrounded by installations; *Kuuban kukkasia* by living house plants, sea shells and colorful papers, and *Birds of Paradise* by all kinds of kitsch junk such as plastic bags, wrapping paper, party decorations, toys, fabrics and plastic flowers. The same materials were used in the video by making costumes for the performers. The gallery is situated on two floors and I created two distinct worlds around these works. There was also a live performance titled *Paratiisilinnut / Birds of Paradise*, which was based on the same performative material as the similarly titled video work.

In retrospect, in relation to the tropical themes and their representations I notice that there was a strong element of play involved.

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<sup>51</sup> Mikko Piispa and Anna-Sofia Sysser, "Muutoksen Kuubassa," *Kanava*, no. 4 (2015), 45–48.



Still from video *Kuuban kukkasia*, 2015.



*Still from video Birds of Paradise, 2015.*





## Tropical Room

Next year the play continued, but now with critical notions. In the summer of 2016 I exhibited a multidisciplinary work, *Tropical Room*, where I wanted to play with Finnish constructions of the tropical. The work was part of a group exhibition, *Pori Biennaali 2016 – Saatanan kesänäyttely (Pori Biennale 2016 – Bloody Summer Exhibition)*, in Pori, Finland. I realized the work through an exploration process in the city of Pori. I documented all the explorations on video and compiled them into a video work titled *Trooppinen Pori*.

My aim was to find ‘tropical’ elements in the streets and interiors of Pori, but I also aimed to find possible connections to the actual tropics. I visited the Yterri beach dunes and collected sand from there and visited *The Ark Nature Centre* of Pori to see its impressive collection of tropical butterflies. At the city’s big flea market I searched for objects that had typical ‘tropical’ imagery and found many. The visual vocabulary of the flea market findings is easy to read: a drinking glass picturing a flamingo in a sunset, beach towels with coral and parrot illustrations, snorkeling gear, a lamp made out of a big seashell, brightly colored blankets for resting on “the beach”, plastic flowers, drink stirring sticks portraying flamingoes and bamboos, toy tigers and insects – very tropicalist imagery. I also bought a new foldable beach chair and an inflatable plastic palm tree. In addition, I asked local friends for objects they considered tropical and borrowed these for the installation. I also collected all possible ‘tropical’ products from the food stores of Pori and recorded myself consuming them.

*Tropical Room* was an installation occupying a whole room in the exhibition space. I called the work an artificial “miniature tropics”, and combined the found materials from Pori with audiovisual material I had gathered during my travels in the actual Tropics. The audiovisual material consisted of video and audio recordings from Indonesia (Bandung, Maluku, Jakarta) Cuba (Baracoa, Havana, Bayamo) and Vietnam (Dong Hoi, Phong Nha-ke bang). The video material was projected to cover an entire wall. I aimed to create an artificial landscape and selected a mix of changing views, ranging from iconic swaying palm trees to more urban “not-so-recognizable” tropical settings.



Still from video *Trooppinen Pori (Tropical Pori)*, 2016.



*Detail from Tropical Room, installation, 2016.*

*Photo: Nüilo Rinne.*

For the installation, I borrowed three plastic indoor plants from Pori University Centre and Aalto University facilities. When asking the staff members for them, they responded by saying they were not even aware of having those plants in their spaces. In my eyes, this is an example of how accustomed many are to these kind of interior elements. It seems that these plastic plants have a tendency to turn invisible, going easily unnoticed by many. The exhibition room itself was in a former power plant, had turquoise walls, and had paint that was already quite decayed. The walls suited my project perfectly, since they reminded me of walls I had seen in Cuba. In one corner of the room I created a “sea” from turquoise A4 papers on the ground. On top of them, I placed empty plastic bottles and other plastic trash. This element sprung from my personal experience of noticing the amount of plastic in the waters and forests on my travels.

Naming the work Tropical Room guided as the way it was perceived. I borrowed this logic from the ‘tropical’ brands and products directly. The room had two entrances, and I attached two texts on either side of each threshold. On one of them: “Kauriin kääntöpiiri – Tropic of Capricorn”, and on the other: “Kravun kääntöpiiri – Tropic of Cancer”. Thus the visitor would also “cartographically” step to the ‘tropics’.

Through Tropical Room, I wanted to contemplate and start a discussion around the artificial ‘tropical’ in the Finnish everyday. In the exhibition catalogue, I wrote a short essay presenting similar questions as in this thesis: “Our seas will never reach as warm as 30 °C degrees, therefore we have spas that advertise ”+32°c Every day!”” Furthermore, I described my work as borrowing marketing strategies from the ‘tropical’ leisure centers: “Even though it is summer outside, there will be an ‘eternal summer’ in here.”

In addition to this, I presented a few images from a photo series titled Tropical Rooms. I have an ongoing series where I photograph interiors of places I have visited that are situated in the tropical zone. Most of these places are accommodations, rooms for tourists. The interiors fascinate me for their choice of furniture, color, architecture or feeling, and through the fact that they are designed for visitors. In relation to my thesis data, I also noticed that it is very rare to see images of tropical interiors in the product packaging. Images of tropical exteriors dominate the imagery.





*Tropical Room, installation, 2016.*

*Photo: Niilo Rinne.*

### Thesis exhibition: Touching palm trees, artificial waves, 'tropical' dreams

At the moment of writing this, the exhibition portion of my thesis is still in process. Therefore, I have chosen to only give a brief introduction to it, focusing on its video material. The exhibition takes place in *Asematila* cultural space, in Helsinki, in December 2017.

I present three different video works containing material from:

- 1) interviews with artists Muhammad Hasnan Habib, Martina Miño Pérez and Paola de Ramos
- 2) my visits to the 'tropical' places in Finland
- 3) visits I made in Taiwan crossing the Tropic of Cancer by train and to the *Tropic of Cancer Marker* monument.

The video interviews I conducted were with fellow students who have moved to Finland from tropical countries: Indonesia, Ecuador and Brazil. During my thesis process, I had the feeling that my references, data, and my personal position represent the point of view of an outsider to the tropics. I wanted to discuss with Hasnan, Martina and Paola how they, from an "insider's" point of view, understand and relate to the tropics – especially now that they are not living there. I tried asking them similar questions as I ask in this study, but letting them define the tropical from their own point of view. The starting question was "what do you think is tropical?". From there the discussion ranged to various themes including climate, the arts, and notions of how the interviewees' lives differ in Finland in comparison to their lives in their native countries. I also asked what the interviewees' thought could be considered tropical in Finland, or where could I find this. This led to very concrete findings, observed during walks with the interviewees in our study environment (the Art House in Otaniemi), the interviewees' studios, and in Itäkeskus shopping mall in Eastern Helsinki. I presented interviewees with my notions on the artificial 'tropical' phenomenon in Finland, and we discussed the thoughts it provoked for the interviewees.

The second video documents and presents my visits to 'Finnish tropical' places in audiovisual form. In the third video, I wanted to present by way of comparison my explorations with 'tropical' themes conducted in the

actual tropics. In January 2017, I was visiting Taiwan. In the place where Tropic of Cancer crosses Taiwan, I documented my physical transition as I crossed this invisible line, moving from outside to inside the tropical zone. I also visited a monument park that honors the Tropic of Cancer (titled in English, *Tropic of Cancer Marker*), located in Hualien County's Ruisui Township. All three videos are presented on separate screens. This reflects three different points of view relating to the connecting theme.

Also this thesis publication is available for reading in the exhibition space during the exhibition. The visual layout of the publication is very important and I have worked with designer-artist Sanna Ritvanen to find the visual form which fits the content. The thesis exhibition does not mark a final point in my working, on the contrary I feel that I will have plenty of material to continue working with in the future.

*Still from video Crossing the Tropic of Cancer (working title), 2017.*

*Photo: Mikko Piispa.*





## Connecting characteristics in my works

Besides the connecting theme, what are the similar characteristics found in these works? In my practice the aspects of encountering and meeting have an important role. The question of *‘how to be together?’* guided my working with Surprise Paradise and has continued with me since, even though with some projects it is more in the background. I think this question rose into my thinking during or due to the travels I have made. Although I did have an interest towards thinking of togetherness and encountering already before the travels, maybe the travels pushed me to think about it further, seeing it also from outside of my own cultural sphere or background.

Using an experiential approach is important for me, and I think about the visitor’s point of view quite a lot. My works are not only visualizations, but address other senses too in order to create a sensory understanding of the theme as well as a feeling of experiencing a space. This might allow a certain mind-set and a bodily way of being. For example, both Surprise Paradise and Tropical Room took into account the senses of smell, touch and hearing. Both of them included a soundtrack I compiled from recordings done in various tropical locations. In Surprise Paradise I used an air humidifier and in Tropical Room a scented air refresher, to alter the air of the space. Both exhibitions included an “oasis” I created, where I encouraged visitors to relax or hang out. This guided people to spend time in the work without hurrying, maybe positioning the body to sit or lie down. Later, I noticed it also gave value to leisure and the possible invigorating aspects art can have. In relation to my thesis, there is a connection to vacationing, as the visitor is entering a sort of role play of being on holiday.

Regarding the media used, my working is multidisciplinary. My varied background (theatre, performance, costume making, contemporary art, youth work) influence the means and materials I choose. I have been working with everyday objects, such as groceries, and my artistic materials have been cheap decoration or thrash like materials, often not conventional “art materials” at all. I considered the whole exhibition space as a “canvas”: in Tropical Room my aim was not only to create objects or works displayed in a room, but a room. In Surprise Paradise I was making two rooms, as the gallery was situated in two different floors. These rooms were more like two mini-worlds, with clearly different

atmosphere. In a sense I see a reference here to the artificial ‘tropical’ worlds, which also aim to surround the visitor with an immersive, overall experience. Through the recognizable links to the everyday life, I consider my work multidisciplinary and as bridging art and life.

In the aesthetics of my works a similar nature can be found: bright colors, party decorations, kitsch, plastic flowers, blankets set on the floor and mentions of the summer and enjoyment. The use of plants is also something that connects these works. In Surprise Paradise I borrowed living house plants from friends and brought the plants to the gallery, and in Tropical Room I decided to use only plastic plants to fit the topic better.

To conclude, I consider that I have found quite interesting grounds both thematically and in terms of form. Still, I feel that in the future my work will go various ways and that I will most likely work with several different things instead of one clear artistic or research interest. But at least one consistent aspect might connect my working now and in the future: it is the chance for imagining, since personally I consider this to be most important in art. The chance to imagine other possibilities or other realities is very intriguing to me.

## 5. Afterword: beyond tropicality

Researching these themes and living in the current era of environmental crisis, I cannot help but think about the relationship of these issues. Arnold already in 1996 presented the idea of a human-endorsed environmental crisis in relation to the tropics: “Today, we readily identify the tropics with vanishing rain-forests and tigers pushed to the edge of extinction, a whole world of nature imperilled by human greed and indifference”<sup>52</sup>. Löfgren brings out the rise of new environmental and social problems resulting from the fast growth of the tourism industry, such as pollution and unevenly distributed wealth, to name a few<sup>53</sup>. According to the information we now have, the tropical region is facing big environmental, social and political challenges endorsed by climate change<sup>54</sup>. Nevertheless, ‘tropical’ products and places seem to promote a carefree and sensual approach. I can easily understand this, since this kind of imagery most likely appeals to the consumer better than images of environmental difficulties. But I am wondering how long this imagery stays unchanged or credible.

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<sup>52</sup> Arnold, *The Problem of Nature*, 157.

<sup>53</sup> Löfgren, *On Holiday*, 6.

<sup>54</sup> “Research in Focus”, Tropical Data Hub, accessed March 13, 2017 <https://tropicaldatahub.org/research-in-focus>

No doubt, working with these thesis questions has lead me to more, new questions: how do these 'tropical' representations form our understanding of the actual tropics or make us act towards it? What does it mean to hang around in artificial 'tropical' places, to consume 'tropical' products? What does it mean in a world where natural resources are not infinite? How long will we have water parks, imported fruits, botanical gardens, zoos or plastic palm trees? Climatically and ethically: what could the alternatives be? At the same time the question is: how long will we have coral reefs, rainforests, clean beaches and non-acidic seas? Will we have them longer than the spas? I acknowledge that these questions are difficult to answer and might come across as hopeless, but on the contrary, I wish to promote an optimistic approach.

Linna concludes in her thesis that in order to dismantle and change othering conventions we have to talk about them<sup>55</sup>. My aim is also to bring the topic of artificial 'tropical' and tropicality into discussion in the Finnish context. This research is meant to open a discussion and by no means is it comprehensive. Through more discussions and perspectives on this topic, I hope that consciousness about how the tropical is represented in the global North will increase, and also that here in Finland we can see behind and beyond these representations.

One of the groceries in my data is a *Tropical juice* packaged in a glass jar. The cap of the jar has a beautiful, thought-provoking pair of words on it, written in the same font as the "Best Before" markings. The cap says: MULTI TROPICAL. Probably the text is short for "multivitamin tropical juice" and has been shortened to fit the cap, but in my mind this *Multi Tropical* implies a possible wider understanding of the tropical. Denis Cosgrove writes about the difficulties of representation: "Like any other geography, the tropics is a place, made up of places that are tropical in the myriad ways that humans inhabit them"<sup>56</sup>. I feel that just as the humans are missing from the construction of the 'Finnish tropical', so is the myriad. I hope it could exist within the Multi Tropical. I find these lines by Felix Driver tempting: "Notions of tropicality, whether geographical, scientific or aesthetic, are not simply the product of imperial fantasy: they also contain other experiences, and other possibilities"<sup>57</sup>. The line "other

<sup>55</sup> Linna, "*Kolumbuksen jalanjäljissä*," 73.

<sup>56</sup> Cosgrove, "Tropic and Tropicality," 216.

<sup>57</sup> Driver, "Tropicality," 777.

possibilities" especially inspires me in relation to a more contemporary or futuristic understanding of (or with!) the tropical, possibly a more encountering and equal one. Personally this thesis journey has been eye-opening, and I hope it can be seen in my practice.



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## Attachment: Lilluja muovipalmujen alla

Asetelma on tämä: olen sukuloimassa Kainuussa pääsiäisenä 2017.  
Loman viimeisenä päivänä päätän vierailla paikallisessa kylpylässä.

Avaan lomakeskuksen oven. Golf, kylpylä, keilailu, laskettelu, lentopallo, kuntosali, lasten leikkihuone, lomaosakkeet, mökit, kelkka-ajelut, yökerho, karaoke, illan artistit, hääyöt, pizza-illallinen, kaljaa. Kaikki saman katon alta.

Haistan kookoksen. Ehkä tuoksu tulee minua vastaan astuvan naisen vartalovoiteesta. Aulan sohvaloungessa on pari palmua. Kosketan palmun lehteä sormillani. Se on yllättäen elävä.

Kohtaan kassahenkilön katseen pikaisesti ja saan häneltä kumisen, kellonmuotoisen kylpylärannekkeen, joka laskee uinti-aikaani. Sillä voin myös ostaa kylpylän allasbaarista juomia, jos haluan.

Pukuhuone-alue on unisex. Etsin pukukopin ja vaihdan uimapukuun. Uikkari ja pyyhe päälläni ängen käytävällä kaikki talvitavarat lokerikkoon, jonka lukitsen näyttämällä ranneketta lukulaitteelle. Lattia tuntuu kylmältä varpaiden alla. Olen lukenut nettisivuilta lupauksen, että kylpylässä ilma ja vesi ovat aina +32-asteista. Toivon todella, että lupaus pitää, koska haluan lillumaan.

Pesuhuoneessa asiat kuten hygieniä ja kuukautiset lipuvat ajatuksissani, kun näen jonkun tulevan vessasta bikinit päällään. Juuri ennen astumista pesutiloista huomaa laminoidun kyltin ilmoittavan: “kylpylässä on kameravalvonta”. Englanniksi teksti huomauttaa lisää: “In the tropical spa, there is a digital camera surveillance system.” Olemme siis trooppisessa paikassa. Sen jälkeen ajattelen, että liimautuukohan uimapukuni liian kiinni ihooni. Korjaan olkaimien asentoa.

Skannaan kylpylämaailmaa. Korkea, atrium-tyylinen... altaat, sillat, kävelypolut, sokkelo... kunto-uinti, diskoallas, saunamaailma, roomalainen kylpy... ulko-ovi, sieltä savusauna, palju... Aloitan kuntoaltaalta. Tulee kunnollinen olo, kun ensin hetken ui oikeasti. Vaikkakin muistan aina, kun joskus TV:ssä joku amerikkalaismies kertoi kamppailustaan ylipainon kanssa, että hänen paras aseensa oli uima-altaassa oleminen. Siis ei uiminen, vaan hengäminen. Perustelu oli, että kun veden lämpötila on kehoa alempi, niin keho kuluttaa kuitenkin enemmän kuin maalla. Kuva kotipihansa altaassa lilluvasta miehestä tulee usein mieleeni, kun olen uimahallissa ja matkan uiminen ei huvitakaan.

Palaan takaisin kylpylän puolelle. Soundtrack on sekoitus veden, ihmisten ja koneiden ääniä. Ihminen on täällä kaikkialla. Muistan, kun olimme täällä joskus pienenä ja serkkuni kertoi, että tänne kylpylän veteen ei kannata pissata. Vedessä on sellaista ainetta, joka värjäytyy vihreäksi, jos joku pissaa. Ja serkku oli kuullut, että kerran joku kansanedustaja oli pissannut ja sen perässä oli lillunut vihreä vana, kun se ui. Ja se oli mennyt ihan punaiseksi ja kaikki oli huomanneet ja nauraneet, ja se kansanedustaja oli vaan jähmettynyt ja uinut koiraa ympyrässä. Olisin silloin todella halunnut kokeilla ja pissata, mutta en uskaltanut. Ehkä nyt kahdenkymmenen vuoden jälkeen? Tai sitten ei.

Kaikissa altaissa lojuu joku, mutta tuolta onneksi juuri poistuu joku perhe. Istun tyhjiin porealtaaseen katselemaan kylpylän luontoa. Palmuja, saniaisia, köynnöskasveja, kukkia, kaikki muovia. Paitsi palmunrungot ovat aitoja, kuolleita palmun runkoja. Mietin, missä päin maailmaa palmut ovat kasvaneet. Porealtaan yläpuolelle kiveen on kasvanut jotain ylimääräistä. Se näyttää vähän korallilikiveltä.

Toisella puolella kylpylää näen japanilaisen torii-portin, jonka ympärillä on japanilaisen puutarhan kasveja erilaisissa muovin sävyissä.

Kirsikankukkia, japaninmänty mutta toisaalta myös alppiruusuja. Torii-portissa kulkee punaista jouluvalonauhaa. Japanissa nämä portit ovat shinto-temppelien tai -alttareiden luona ja niiden läpi astutaan pyhälle alueelle. Tämä kylpyläportti sijaitsee seinää vasten. Mietin onko joku sisustussuunnittelija halunnut viestiä japanilaisesta kylpyperinteestä, onsen-kylpylöistä. Tai ehkä portti oli tarjouksessa.

Ei kun nyt vähemmän analyysiä ja enemmän aisteja. Mä olen kaikkialla muutenkin tarpeeksi ajatuksissani, niin nyt vaan lillumista. Liu'un viereiseen altaaseen, puen uimalasit ja sukellan. Veden alla kylpylän äänet vaimenevat ja puuroutuvat hitaaksi massaksi. Näen lamppuja, ihmisten jalkoja, käteni, niissä leijuvat ihokarvat. Pohjalla vaeltelee hiuspallo. Vesi on kirkasta ja näkyvyys hyvä, mutta en löydä simpukoita, leviä tai kaloja. Toisaalta ei myöskään meduusoita tai pistäviä kiviä. Lillun keveänä matalassa vedessä, raajat virtaavat eteenpäin ja ajelehtivat itsestään. Kehä hakeutuu kerälle, halaan polviani, sen jälkeen jäseneneni kurottavat kaikki eri suuntiin. Kuvittelen itseni meritähden muotoon, pää viidentenä sakarana, hitaasti lilluen, välillä jollakin raajalla vettä halaten. Tuntuu lempeältä. Lilluminen. Lillua. Lillutella. Lilluja. Olen todellinen lilluja. Lillun, lillut, me kaikki lillumme täällä. Samassa vedessä, rutiinien ulkopuolella, tärkeimpänä toimintana rentoutuminen. On lämmintä, kevyttä, joka ihosolu tuntee veden. On vaan ihanaa lillua. Mieleeni lipuu oikea meritähti, jonka näin Indonesiassa pari vuotta sitten. Se halasi korallikiveä meren pohjassa. Ihailin, miten lempeästi ne olivat yhdessä. Myöhemmin sain selville, että hellyyden sijaan meritähti hyödynsi ja kuihdutti.

Maistan kylpyveden kloorin suussani. Vatsaa alkaa nipistellä, kun happi loppuu pinnan alla. Käänny pintaan.

Nousen altaasta ja käyn aurinkotuolille makoilemaan. Tuoleissa tai viereisissä palmunlehtimajoissa ei ole ketään. Metallisella tuolilla istuminen tuntuu kylmältä, märkä uimapuku litistyy lähemmäs ihoa ja selkänöjä painautuu lapoihin. Mutta oudointa on maata rantatuolilla ilman rantaa. Mietin, mitä täällä oikeastaan tapahtuu. Ainakin suomalainen luonto pysyy ulkona. Sisällä ei ole tekokoivuja ja turkoosit kaakelit haluavat muistuttaa kaukaisista meristä. Ne on lainattu jostain ja loppu on kuviteltu. Tältä näyttää loma, tältä tuntuu loma, täällä on kaikki tunnusmerkit. Tunnistamme kyllä teennäiset piirteet, mutta hyväksymme ne, koska saamme vastalahjaksi lillua. Katselen

yläpuolellla kaartuvia muovipalmuja ja pohdin, milloin tämä paikka on perustettu ja kuinka kauan tämä tulee olemaan. Tai muut tekomaailmat: kasvitieteelliset puutarhat, eläintarhat tai muoviviidakot. Onko kylpylöitä kauemmin kuin koralliriuttoja?

Seuraavaksi katseeni osuu uimavalvojen koppiin, joka imitoi Baywatch-tyyliä. Kun nousin altaasta ajattelin valvojen katsovan minua ja suoristin ihoon liimaantunutta uikkariani. Teen niin aina. Valvojen kopin vierestä on portaat irkkubaariin. Uikkariasuiset asiakkaat kävelevät portaita alas tuopit kädessä ison altaan kautta luolamaiseen baarialtaaseen, jossa voi istua baaritiskillä puoliksi vedessä. Kuvittelen, kuinka he yhtäkkiä kompastuvat ja kaljat liukenevat veteen. Seuraa kaaosreaktio: valvoja kaatuu kopistaan, porealtaassa oksennetaan ja jonkun uikkarit putoavat kinttuihin. Uimapatjat pomppivat, vesisuihkut suihkivat uimareita naamaan, sprinklerit käynnistyvät katossa, altaat tulvivat, palmut kaatuvat, altaat tyhjenevät, ulkona vuodenaajat ja ilmasto vaihtuvat, täällä on silti lämmin, muodostuu uskomaton spa-ekosysteemi, hedelmäpuutarha, vesikirppuja, ihmeellisiä uusia eliöitä, ihmiset oppivat uimaan paremmin, seuraaville sukupolville kasvaa kidukset, paratiisilinnut tanssivat, kukaan ei enää halua pois, tämä oli sittenkin paratiisi. Pieni liilaihoinen vesinokkaeläin tarjoaa minulle passionhedelmän puolikasta. Mietin, tartunko siihen vai lopetanko tämän kuvitelman. Päätän olla tarttumatta ja jatkaa kylpylämaailmassa, jossa kaikki on todellisuudessa ihan samalla tavalla kuin hetki sitten. En ole enää varma, kauanko olen ollut täällä, mutta arvelen kylpyaikani olevan loppuillaan. Haluan vielä sauna rauhasa. Saada kehoon lämmön ennen pakkasta.

Pukukopissa on ryysis, kun ihmiset tulevat rinteestä. Puen nopeasti talvikerrokset päälleni. Viimeisenä riisun rannekkeen ja palautan sen metalliporttiin avautuvaan luukkuun. Portilla vastaan tulee pariskunta kylpytakeissa. He kävelevät peräkkäin ja heillä on vakavat ilmeet. Toivon, että he voivat lillua onnistuneesti.

Kylpylän jälkeen on nälkä. Vesi kiihdyttää aineenvaihduntaa, muistelen tv:n lilluvaa amerikkalaismiestä. Lomakeskuksen ravintolasta on ikkunat kylpylän suuntaan. Syön pitsaa ja kuulen, kun mies kauempana sanoo lapsilleen: "Saapi syyssä kahtoa kun muut uiskentellee".

Kuljen takaisin lomakeskuksen aulaan, jossa kookosbodylotion tuoksua edelleen. Sen naisen tuoksu jäi näin pitkäksi aikaa. Tai ehkä esanssia on suihkutettu ilmastointiin. Ulkona on neljä astetta pakkasta, aurinko paistaa ja hanget pelloilla kantavat. Työnnän märät hiukseni pipon alle.

Serkkujeni kotona enoni muistelee: "Mehän oltiin siellä avajaisissa. Se oli -91. Muistan sen siitä, kun olit silloin vauva, semmonen tonttumallinen haalari sinulla oli päällä" hän puhuu serkulleni ja jatkaa: "Mutta olihan se sille perustajalle aikamoinen paikka. Tai siltähän meni kaikki rahat, mutta siellä se kylpylä vielä pyörii." Kuulemma japanilainen porttikin oli jo silloin siellä.

Ehkä kylpylämaailma on ikuinen, vaikka kaikki muu ympärillä lilluisi.





